(b) MRTP Commission, a quasi-judicial body, is already seized of the matter regarding cartelization by the cement companies.

(c) The information is being collected from the State Government.

Trade Imbalance with China

3857. MS. MABEL REBELLO:
SHRI B.J. PANDA:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that our trade imbalance with China has grown very fast and there is an urgent need to rectify this; and

(b) if so, what is the existing trade deficit, *inter-alia* indicating the action plan of the Government to bridge this gap?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) The trade balance is currently in favour of China. During the year 2006-07, imports from China were US$ 17.44 billion and exports US$ 8.28 billion resulting in trade deficit of US$ 9.16 billion. The issue of rising trade deficit was taken up by the Commerce & Industry Minister on January 12,2008 during his talks with the Chinese Minister of Commerce. However, the Government does not plan to bridge trade gaps with individual countries.

Connivance of cement companies in fixing prices

†3858. SHRI SATYAVRAT CHATURVEDI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) in its decision has stated that the cement companies of private sector had connived in fixing the prices of cement from February, 1990 to April, 1990;

(b) the retail prices of cement in December, 2005 and December, 2007;

(c) the reasons behind rapid price-hike of cement; and

(d) the action being taken by Government against the companies responsible for it?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) The average price of cement in December 2005 was Rs. 158/- per bag and Rs. 230/- per bag in December 2007. The increase in cement prices is mainly due to mis-match between demand and supply. Government has taken a number of measures to increase the supply of cement in the market to cater to increased demand. These include facilitating import by reducing the import duty on cement to 'Nil', removal of countervailing duty and special additional customs duty. Further, MMTC Ltd., a Government of India enterprise, TANCEM, a State Government enterprise of Tamil Nadu and M/s. Puducherry Agro Services

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Industries Corporation (PASIC) have been given a special dispensation to import cement under the provisions of Cement (Quality Control) Order, 2003 to enable availability of significant quantities of imported cement in the market. The export of cement has also been banned and Government's resolve to take strict measures to curb profiteering and cartelization have been announced.

Extending coffee plantations to non-traditional areas

3859. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ministry is taking up measures to extend coffee plantations to non-traditional areas of the country;

(b) if so, whether the hilly regions are included under the said expansions;

(c) if so, which regions of Andhra Pradesh are covered under the project;

(d) what has been the proposed financial outlay earmarked for coffee development in the State;

(e) whether the measures include capacity building for all stake holders; and

(f) if so, the details of the capacity building measures and the details of stakeholders?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Ananthagiri, Araku Valley, Dumbriguda, Hukumpeta, Peddabayalu, Manchingput, Paderu, G. Madugula, Chintappali, and G.K. Veedhi Mandals in Visakhapatnam District of Andhra Pradesh are covered under the coffee development programme.

(d) Out of Rs. 45 crore allocated for the development of coffee in Non Traditional Areas (NTAs) during the Eleventh Plan period, Rs. 40 crore is provided for Andhra Pradesh.

(e) Yes, Sir.

(f) The capacity building measures in NTAs are mainly focused on the training and skill building of coffee growers, farm workers and resource personnel of the Agencies who are involved in coffee cultivation, by conducting on farm training, study tours, group meetings, campaigns, workshops etc.

Export of Ayurvedic medicines and natural herbs

†3860. SHRI BANWARI LAL KANCHHAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Indian Ayurvedic medicines and natural herbs are highly in demand in Europe; and

(b) the details of steps being taken by Government to promote the export of said items?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) There is greater awareness

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.